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ABSTRACT

The concept and implementation of long-range planning for student affairs is considered, and a simple model for planning that could be useful to chief student personnel officers is presented. Several issues are considered in this process: the conditions and premises crucial to planning, a systematic approach to planning, the locus of the planning activity, some alternative decision-making models and a practical guide for planning. Long-range planning in the present analysis refers to planning for a time span of approximately one to five years. It is suggested that today planning occurs in a declining or steady state world, not in a growth environment, and this reality produces a fundamental change in the planning stance. The content of planning efforts should entail ascertaining and identifying inputs into the planning process and identifying appropriate response to plans. The input for student affairs areas includes a variety of student-centered data, including enrollment trends, the nature of student interests, and housing preferences. The input also would include information on institutional mission and finances, facility uses and adequacy, and state and national educational and economic trends. The content of the planning response follows directly from these inputs: programmatic efforts, staffing questions, and facilities development. It is proposed that student affairs divisions must plan within the context of established university or college direction and goals. Additionally, the assumptions and values of the planners affect the planning process itself. The locus of responsibility for the following activities is identified: student personnel unit planning, interunit planning, and central office planning and management information development. (SW)

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Long Range Planning in Student Affairs

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Abstract

This paper addresses the concept and implementation of long range planning for student affairs. Although it is a function generally neglected by student affairs professionals, long range planning represents a proactive rather than reactive approach to an uncertain future. The specific intent of this paper is to provide a relatively simple model for planning which could be useful, both philosophically and pragmatically, to chief student personnel officers. Several issues are considered in this process: 1) the conditions and premises crucial to planning, 2) a systematic approach to planning, 3) the locus of the planning activity, 4) some alternative decision-making models, and 5) a practical guide for planning. The authors consider long range planning to be a vital element in effective management.

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Long Range Planning in Student Affairs

No task in the management of student affairs is less attended to than long range planning. It suffers, as do many management tasks in the field, from lack of specific training for the function, lower priority due to day-to-day pressures, and inability to produce immediate and visible payoff. Yet, the hard truth is that if we do not plan our future, someone else will plan it for us. The implication is clear: Student affairs divisions must find better ways to identify future needs and prepare themselves to meet those needs. Such planning activities do not come easily to the area of student affairs, since we tend to be so busy keeping up with the present that the future seldom is of major concern. As a result, planning becomes something akin to visiting one's great aunt--it is something we know we ought to do and probably could live better with ourselves if we did, but somehow we never really get the job done! Perhaps it is this historic inattention to planning functions in student affairs, underrepresented in both practice and literature, that fosters the "crisis management" syndrome. The theme of this article will be that in order to gain time later, one must devote time now for this important function. Both the quality and security of our work will increase as a result of the planning effort.

Obviously, one of the difficulties in considering the planning effort is the bewildering complexity of issues, techniques, models, and conceptual frameworks from which to choose. The likelihood is that the well-meaning student personnel leader, already pressed for time, recognizes this difficulty and never begins, or begins only to lose

sight of the goals, and consequently, produces an effort which is not really satisfactory either to self or to staff. The intent of this paper is to suggest some practical solutions to this problem and to provide a relatively simple model for planning, which could be useful to student affairs administrators in a variety of settings or types of schools. Several issues will be considered in this process:

1. The conditions and premises crucial for planning
2. A systematic approach to planning
3. Locus of the planning activity
4. Some alternative decision-making models
5. A practical guide for planning

Prior to beginning this agenda, however, a few introductory comments seem important. The effort of planning may be best understood by examination of some of the popular assumptions about it. Drucker (1970), in his classic essay on long range planning, identifies three non-definitions of planning:

1. It is <u>not</u> "forecasting." We have little or no ability to predict or control the future. The planning effort is necessary precisely because we cannot forecast.

2. It does <u>not</u> deal with future decisions. Rather, long range planning deals with the <u>futurity</u> of present decisions. The question for student affairs staff is not what to do about tomorrow, but what do we have to do today to be ready for an uncertain tomorrow.

3. It is <u>not</u> an attempt to eliminate risk. By definition, we must commit present resources to the future and thus deal with highly uncertain expectations. The goal is to manage the risks appropriately by choosing the <u>right</u> risks to take.

By ruling out these characteristics of long range planning, a workable definition becomes somewhat easier to obtain. Drucker (1970) calls long range planning "the continuous process of making present risk-taking decisions systematically and with the best possible knowledge of their futurity, organizing systematically the efforts needed to carry out these decisions, and measuring the results of these decisions against the expectations through organized, systematic feedback" (pp. 132-133).

The concept of long range planning in this paper refers to planning for a time span of approximately one to five years. In actuality, the distinction between short and long range planning is somewhat arbitrary. Strictly speaking, short range and long range planning do not describe time spans but rather stages in every decision. Schroeder (1975) suggests that longer range projections often turn into dartboard guesswork. Addressing longer range ramifications seems appropriate, but any detailed planning for more than five years may be wasted effort. A 2-year planning cycle is probably ideal for initial and even sustained efforts in the area of long range planning.

Our efforts in planning in our current world are very different from our planning efforts undertaken fifteen years ago. We plan today in a declining or steady state world, not in a growth environment, and this reality produces a fundamental change in our planning stance. This little or no growth factor alone distinguishes higher education efforts from that of business and industry, where the bulk of the planning literature exists, and renders that literature less helpful than it might otherwise be.

Finally, it is important to identify what the content or substance of our planning efforts should entail. The content consists of two sets of factors: (1) Ascertaining and identifying inputs into the planning process, and (2) identifying appropriate responses or plans to respond. The input for student affairs areas includes a variety of student-centered data: Enrollment trends (including underrepresented and potential new student populations), the nature of student interests, housing preferences, etc. The input would also include information on institutional mission and finances, facility uses and adequacy, activities of other university departments and divisions, and state and national educational and economic trends. The content of the planning response follows directly from these inputs: Programmatic efforts, staffing questions (including numbers, organization, type of qualifications, and compensation), facilities development or recycling, etc.

Viewed in this light, one might conclude that a "reactive" model of student affairs planning is being advocated. We have no intention of implying such a model--a complex interaction exists between input and plans. It seems entirely possible for input to be modified by a plan (e.g., information on the probable demographic mix of students might lead to a plan to systematically alter that mix by directed recruiting and financial aid). Likewise, a plan might affect input (e.g., we may be dissatisfied with the amount and accuracy of data input we have received, and thus, plan to increase both the quality and quantity of such input by reorganization of staff or by creation of a new staff position). The point is not to disregard or do away

with inputs, but rather to be careful in not being governed by them.

Conditions and Premises Crucial for Planning

Probably the single most significant condition for student affairs planning is the recognition that planning cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. Student affairs divisions must plan within the context of established university or college direction and goals. Undeniably, we are faced here with a chicken and egg problem, especially when a decentralized planning strategy for the institution is in effect. Nevertheless, we must ascertain at least some general explicit or implicit university goals, even if these are but a commitment to the status quo. That finding alone is an important input and prescribes a certain direction for the student affairs division.

The characteristics of the decision-makers in the long range planning system form a variable which clearly affects the nature of the process, although describing the "planning-planner" interaction is very difficult and will not be attempted here in any detail. It is clear, however, that student affairs decision-makers carry into the process certain assumptions about what is "real" in the internal and external world of their institution. They also hold certain values about these assumptions. Both the assumptions and the values affect the thinking of the planners, and consequently, the process itself. This uncertain variable is one reason why "paper" planning models are often less helpful than might be expected. Perhaps our best hope in controlling this factor is to be very explicit with ourselves about

the values which we bring to the planning process and to base our assumptions on the best possible information we can generate (see Systems Planning, Track 3, below).

The relative skill and competence of the planner in this system is the other critical aspect of this "planning-planner" interaction. The models and systems described here are only as effective as those who use them. The planning function demands at once vision, creative leadership, and management skills. While we cannot escape our obligation to think small (our daily tasks and activities), long range planning provides us with the opportunity to think big. It is significant that planning at once demands a broad perspective in order to be effective and provides this perspective as an outcome of having been involved in the process. In a student affairs world filled with many trees, the view of the forest which is both demanded and provided by long range planning is a welcome and necessary change.

Finally, two premises underlying our thinking about the planning function need to be made explicit here. First of all, there is no best way for planning to proceed in every student affairs area. The program described in this paper is intended to be an approach to planning rather than a specific technique. The exact use of this approach will depend greatly on the nature of the student affairs areas and of the specific institution. The second premise is that planning, for all its theoretical nature, is still a very political process. Some evidence, in fact, suggests that the failure to implement the emerging student development model in higher education on a broad scale rests precisely with inadequate attention to the competition and political realities in contemporary higher education

(Plato, 1977). No amount of technology or systems models can compensate for inadequate attention to human idiosyncrasies and to institutional realities.

A Systematic Approach to Planning

Schroeder (1975) defines a 3-track system for planning which holds great promise for student affairs planning. The tracks, which are interrelated, and therefore, demand simultaneous development, are:

Track 1: Definition of a planning process

Track 2: Development of plans for the division and its units

Track 3: Development of a planning information system

The first track defines how planning will be done in the division, delineates responsibility for particular planning activities, and identifies a planning calendar. The result of Track 1 should be a clarification of who does what kinds of planning by when.

The second track is probably the most familiar system. It involves assessments of the current situation, identification of goal statements and the means for goal achievement, both for the division and its subunits. These goals and means are developed by the responsible parties as defined by Track 1.

Track 3 develops the information systems for planning. It identifies what data is important to the process, when and how it is to be produced, and who is responsible for providing it. The result of Track 3 should be an information system supporting the planning process. This information generation is important, both in aiding the construction of the plan, and later, in measuring its outcomes.

The components of the above approach to planning are not particularly new, and some aspects of each are usually in operation in most student affairs divisions throughout the country. The combination of all three of these components, however, is less likely. Probably the most frequent model currently in use in higher education emphasizes Track 2. Track 1, if it is present at all, most likely exists in the minds of one or two persons and is neither made explicit nor, consequently, tested for its feasibility. Some facsimile of Track 3 undoubtedly exists, although the interaction of the information sources to the planning function is probably somewhat muddy. This interaction, however, is critical to the nature of the planning process. Drucker (1970) perceives that "measurements, in long range planning, present very real problems, especially conceptual ones. Yet precisely because what we measure and how we measure will determine what will be considered relevant, and thereby determines not just what we see, but what we, and others, do, measurements are all-important in the planning process. . . ." (p. 145).

Schroeder (1975) suggests a 2-step approach to implementation of this model, after specific assignment of responsibility of its implementation. The first step is the initial definition phase, in which the approach to all three tracks is defined and scrutinized. The second phase is the operation and development phase, in which the tracks are put into action and fine tuning adjustments made. A logical time frame for full implementation, Schroeder suggests, would be two to three years.

Locus of Planning

Within the model just described, there is wide latitude for variation. Undoubtedly, one of the central questions which must confront the implementation of such a plan is the issue of assignment of planning functions. Biggs and Skinner (1978) identify two models of planning for student personnel services which address this question. One model emphasizes a centralized function which is handled by a group of experts or specialists, or perhaps by the chief student affairs officer. A second model, a more decentralized approach, focuses on planning as a component of decision-making and utilizes specialists only as resource persons and facilitators. Each of these models has several advantages and disadvantages.

Biggs and Skinner advocate a decentralized planning effort with committees and task forces of staff members across units. This particular approach is based on the assessment of three disparate functions within the Office for Student Affairs. The first function deals with planning for programmatic development and decision-making in different student personnel units. The second function involves decision-making about issues which cut across student personnel lines, and the third is concerned with management decision-making in the central student affairs office. To accomplish these three functions, assignments for planning are allocated as follows:

1. Student personnel unit planning activities. Delegated to primary officers in each of the units. Consultants should be provided as necessary to help these units develop and maintain appropriate planning functions.

2. Interunit planning activities. The major activities for

student affairs divisional committees should be the planning function. Consultants should be provided as needed in order to aid these committees in defining the issues and in meeting planning goals. For example, one large midwestern university uses two major committees to accomplish this function. They are the Long Range Planning Committee, concerned with longer range decision-making, and the Issues Committee, concerned with shorter range issues and strategy. A list of typical types of problems handled by each in recent years is provided in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

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3. Central office planning and management information development. The locus of responsibility for this task is placed in the hands of a small group of specialists, who fill staff positions in the central office, and who are charged with generation of planning information on a variety of management-related issues. How much of the task and what sorts of tasks are assigned to specialists depend a great deal on the size of the student affairs office, the style of management utilized, and the current state of planning in the division. It is important, even in a decentralized planning system, that there be at least one central person who acts as facilitator and consultant and who, in essence, maintains the system. The role of the central office in initiating and maintaining the planning function, especially as it relates to Track 1 and 3 of our planning model, simply cannot be avoided if planning is to thrive and prosper.

Alternative Decision-Making Models

The model suggested in this paper, or any other planning model, in fact, inescapably demands decision-making on all levels, decisions which are often both difficult and complex.

Strong (1974) argues for a systems analysis model for decision-making in student affairs. The specific steps in this framework are indicated in Table 2. Such a framework fits well with the 3-track planning system described earlier, since it is intended to integrate research findings into decisions and to focus needs for future data gathering.

Insert Table 2 here

The integration of this systems approach with the planning model described earlier is significant. Given an effectively operating planning system, it seems quite likely that Step 1 will have already been accomplished and that the data necessary for the evaluation required in Step 4 is already present or can be quickly generated.

Many of our planning functions for student affairs currently, and for the foreseeable future, concern the maintenance of student affairs activities in a steady or declining state. As a result, it is imperative for student personnel planners to focus specifically on criterion measures for decision-making regarding program development, continuation, or deletion.

In assessing the competing demands for resources in student affairs, equity necessitates the creation of a limited set of criteria

or parameters which can be applied in whole, or in part, to each of the activities within the student affairs areas. Such criteria will provide a comparative measurement of various student affairs activities, and hence, promote the best allocation of resources.

An example of one such set of planning criteria is cited below:

1. Essentiality. Is the function essential or more peripheral to the university or student affairs mission?

2. Quality. Does the program or service consistently maintain a high standard of excellence? This may be measured by peer ratings, faculty recognition, student evaluation, contribution to knowledge or practice, etc.

3. Availability. To what degree is the function available outside of the student affairs unit or the university?

4. Need or Demand. What are the student, institutional, and/or societal demands for this function? This may be measured by the number of students and/or staff serviced, number of visits, amount of workload, etc. To what degree does the function meet current versus future projections of need/demand? Is there a legal or public mandate for the function?

5. Efficiency. How effective is the program or service in providing maximum service for the least amount of money? Could the function be performed appropriately with fewer resources? This may involve comparison of units of service produced to resources used.

The explication of these criteria and the mechanisms for their use to student affairs areas are complex issues. Obviously, these criteria interact with each other. A program with high essentiality

but low quality might call for additional fund allocations, while a high need program may not be cost effective and might be reduced in allocation without significant harm to the quality of service of the program.

The decisions made in student affairs planning inevitably involve some risk. In examining such risk, we should consider not only the magnitude of the risk but its character as well. Drucker (1970) identifies three classes of risk possibilities:

1. The kind of risk we can afford to take.

2. The kind of risk we cannot afford to take.

3. That rare but significantly important risk, the risk that we cannot afford <u>not</u> to take.

Each of these conditions implies a choice to take the risk, not to take the risk, or to postpone the decision. In the latter case, it is important to realize that postponement is risk taking in itself and may be irrevocable.

Another categorization of decision-making in the planning process, especially with regard to program development and continuation, is the recognition of categories of program importance that limit and control our decisions. Programs and policies, inevitably, fall into three broadly defined categories:

1. <u>Mandated programs.</u> Programs or their components which <u>must</u> be done, either because of school charter, federal or state mandate, or their vital importance to the operation of the institution. These are programs which we <u>have</u> to do.

2. <u>Necessary programs.</u> Programs or components which, if removed, would significantly alter the quality or operation of the

institution or program. The changes made in these areas will not reduce the institution's or program's capacity to operate, but may alter the nature or level of the services. These are programs which we ought to do.

3. Desirable programs. Programs or their components which add to the quality of life at the institution or within the program but which are not critical to their operation. These are programs we would like to do.

This have to, ought to, like to criterion model of program classification provides some organization to the healthy debate concerning priorities which is inevitably produced by the planning process; it is important for that reason. Coupled with the five criteria of essentiality, quality, availability, need or demand, and efficiency, the criterion model of program classification discussed above provides a systematic base for planning decisions.

A Practical Guide for Planning

Insert Table 3 Here

Table 3 suggests a possible model for implementing the recommendations discussed in this article. Some salient factors appear in the analysis of this model. The first is that the responsibilities for initiation of planning efforts in student affairs must rest ultimately with the chief student personnel officer. He/she must get the ball rolling. The decision regarding allocation of time for monitoring the process by a consultant from within or outside the area seems to be one only the central office can make. In turn, this decision needs to be made prior to the initiation of the planning processes in order to maintain continuity in their implementation.

A related point deals with the planning-for-planning process. The responsibilities here can be assumed by either the central office or the ad-hoc group. There are certain advantages to the creation of a committee for the planning-for-planning process. One important advantage is that such committee work undoubtedly will involve delegation of planning duties and participation in the conceptualization of the system, and hence, might well increase "ownership" of the process. Also, as can be seen in Table 3, the planning-for-planning process involves a great many decisions regarding information needs, planning levels, timetables, possible planning mechanisms, etc. A variety of input into those decisions is important. One way such input might be obtained is by submission of a tentative plan constructed by the central office to a policy group for verification. The latter system probably is less time consuming and has the advantage of economy of effort and decreased frustration, since planning-for-planning seems far removed from the final goal of a well-managed student affairs area and may be less immediate, and therefore, more frustrating than actual involvement in the planning process itself.

Finally, it should be noted that the ultimate benefits for establishing a responsive, creative planning process must always be kept in sight. The essence of planning is to make present decisions with the knowledge of their futurity. We must ask the basic questions: What do we have to do today if we want to be some place in the future? What will not get done at all if we do not commit resources to it today? What would be the immediate impact of this decision and its longer term ramifications?

Planning, after all, is a means to an end, and should remain so. The goal is a well-managed, proactive, responsive student affairs division--flexible, self-directive, within the context of clear direction and purpose. Planning is the tool to do this. At the inception of the planning program, no doubt, it may well resemble the dog and not the tail. Done well, however, the planning system should eventually exist as an unobtrusive, ongoing contribution to effective management in student affairs and not as a glamorous symbol of our effectiveness. To draw a homely analogy, it should more resemble the drafthorse than the thoroughbred. It is the vehicle to carry the payload. Without it as our steady and durable companion, we have and will continue to shoulder a day-to-day burden for management, planning, and decision-making far beyond what is or should be appropriate. Given a good planning system, we might have less fun at conventions complaining about our workload but a lot more fun in our jobs! More importantly, as educators, we shall be engaged in creating rather than predicting the future of higher education.

Table 1

Model for Allocation of Planning Content

Long Range Planning Committee

1. New organizational and programmatic structures for student career development.
2. Effect of fluctuating enrollment on student affairs.
3. Policies for financial aid areas.
4. Creation of student affairs committees on (1) academic freedom and responsibility, and (2) promotion and tenure.
5. Proposal for student affairs training program regarding upset/disturbed students.

Issues Committee

1. Alcoholic beverages policy.
2. Reserve funds policy.
3. Non-student participation in student affairs-sponsored programs.
4. University contracts with Student Legal Services.
5. Compliance with Title 504 Regulations regarding handicapped students.

Table 2

5-Step Decision Model

1. Determine System Objectives
   a. Identify objectives
   b. Detail problems
   c. Identify and detail existing systems
   d. Identify other factors
2. Create Operational Flow Model
   a. Identify necessary activities
   b. Determine sequence of activities
3. Create Possible Alternative Systems
   a. Identify and detail possible components
   b. Create alternative systems
4. Evaluate Alternative Systems
   a. Create evaluation model
   b. Determine measures of effectiveness and system characteristics
   c. Estimate effectiveness of alternative systems
   d. Estimate costs of alternative systems
5. Select Best Alternative

Table 3

A Planning Model

Responsible Agencies	Categories
	Planning-for-Planning
Ad-hoc planning committee or Central student affairs office	1. Identify planning mechanisms, time frames, and levels of planning 2. Identify information needs 3. Identify planning calendar 4. Assess current capabilities and mechanisms to meet these planning activities
	Planning
Ongoing planning bodies	1. Establish criteria for decision-making 2. Establish planning issues; test for appropriateness within a model 3. Produce and utilize plans
Central student affairs staff or ongoing planning group	4. Monitor and fine tune
	Information
Information supply mechanisms.	1. Produce baseline information for planning decisions.
Planning mechanisms	2. Use information 3. Supply feedback on quality and effectiveness of information
Information mechanisms	4. Produce information on outcomes of planning decisions

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